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ABSTRACT

The major theory examined in this paper is that the increasing problem of illiteracy in the United States may be due to a faulty method of teaching reading. The causes of the illiteracy problem and possible solutions are explored using evidence from reading research and classroom results. The following topics concerning the teaching of reading are covered: (1) why America has a reading problem; (2) historical evidence that everyone can be taught to read; (3) two ways to teach reading--whole language and the "code" approach; (4) historical aspects of the way reading is taught; (5) Blaise Pascal, the inventor of modern systematic language instruction; (6) the 19th century "look and say" style of teaching reading introduced; (7) the 20th century "look and say" style of teaching established as the norm; (8) the basal reader; (9) research studies that show the phonetics approach is better than the whole language approach; (10) responses of reading professionals to research findings; (11) why faulty methods continue to be used; (12) additional obstacles to reading reform; (13) how teachers feel about reading methods; (14) the Reading Reform Foundation; and (15) which federal programs impact illiteracy. Overwhelming evidence is presented that the antidote to illiteracy is the restoration of the instructional practice of intensive, systematic phonics in every primary classroom. A list of 30 sources is included. (JS)

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U.S. Senate Republican Policy Committee

William L. Armstrong, *Chairman* **September 13, 1989**

ILLITERACY:
An Incurable Disease or Education Malpractice?

"Learning to read is like learning to drive a car. You take lessons and learn the mechanics and the rules of the road. After a few weeks you have learned how to drive, how to stop, how to shift gears, how to park, and how to signal. You have also learned to stop at a red light and understand road signs. When you are ready, you take a road test, and if you pass, you can drive. Phonics-first works the same way. The child learns the mechanics of reading, and when he's through, he can read. Look and say works differently. The child is taught to read before he has learned the mechanics — the sounds of the letters. It is like learning to drive by starting your car and driving ahead. . . . And the mechanics of driving? You would pick those up as you go along."

Rudolf Flesch, *Why Johnnie Still Can't Read*, 1981

Illiteracy in America is still growing at an alarming rate and that fact has not changed much since Rudolf Flesch wrote his best selling expose of reading instruction in 1955. Illiteracy continues to be a critical problem, demanding enormous resources from local, state, and federal taxes, while arguments about how to teach children to read continue to rage within the education research community, on Capitol Hill, in business, and in the classroom.

The International Reading Association estimates that more than one thousand research papers are prepared each year on the subject of literacy, and that is very likely a low figure. For the past 50 years, America's classrooms have been used by psychologists, sociologists, educationists, and politicians as a giant laboratory for unproven, untried theories of learning, resulting in a near collapse of public education. It is time we begin to move away from "what's new" and move toward "what works."

Here Are the Grim Statistics

- As much as a quarter of the American labor force, anywhere from 20 to 27 million adults, lack the basic reading, writing, and math skills necessary to perform in today's increasingly complex job market.
- One out of every four teenagers drops out of high school, and of those who graduate, one out of every four has the equivalent of an eighth grade education.

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- According to current estimates, the number of functionally illiterate adults is increasing by approximately two and one quarter million persons each year. This number includes nearly 1 million young people who drop out of school before graduation, 400,000 legal immigrants, 100,000 refugees, and 800,000 illegal immigrants.
- Eighty-four percent of the 23,000 people who took an exam for entry-level jobs at New York Telephone in 1988, failed.
- More than half of Fortune 500 companies have become educators of last resort, with the cost of remedial employee training in the three R's reaching more than 300 million dollars a year.
- One estimate places the yearly cost in welfare programs and unemployment compensation due to illiteracy at six billion dollars. An additional 237 billion dollars a year in unrealized earnings is forfeited by persons who lack basic reading skills, according to Literacy Volunteers of America.
- The federal government alone has more than 79 literacy-related programs administered by 14 federal agencies.
- The total amount of money being spent on illiteracy by the federal government can only be guessed at, because there has never been a complete assessment prepared. A conservative estimate would place the amount at more than ten billion dollars each year, and growing steadily.

Why Does America Have A Reading Problem?

The question that must be asked is this: Why does America have a reading problem at all? We are the most affluent and technologically advanced of all the industrial nations on earth. We have "free" compulsory education for all, a network of state owned and operated teachers' colleges, strict teacher certification requirements, and more money and resources dedicated to educating our children than any other nation on earth.

Why Johnnie Can't Read Provides an Answer

Rudolf Flesch, author of *Why Johnny Can't Read* wrote the following in a letter to his daughter in 1955, after teaching his grandson to read:

> "Since I started to work with Johnny, I have looked into this whole reading business. I worked my way through a mountain of books and articles on the subject, I talked to dozens of people, and I spent many hours in classrooms, watching what was going on.
>
> What I found is absolutely fantastic. The teaching of reading — all over the United States, in all the schools, in all the textbooks — is totally wrong and flies in the face of all logic and common sense. Johnny couldn't read until half a year ago for the simple reason that nobody ever showed him how."

Time magazine called his book "the outstanding educational event of that year" and suggested that he represented "the devil in the flesch" to the education establishment.

There is an answer to "why Johnny can't read," but the answer is tough medicine to swallow. It requires education professionals, who for years have been engaged in a form of education malpractice, to admit that the methods of teaching reading they have vigorously advocated and staunchly defended ever since the 1930's are dead wrong.

If we are to seriously reverse the increasing number of illiterate adults in America and prevent the problem of illiteracy, we must swallow the medicine, as quickly as possible, and reject the instructional methods that have resulted in the widespread illiteracy we have today.

Everyone Can Be Taught To Read

Historically, all American school children were taught to read. Teachers never considered that a child "could not" be taught to read, and remedial reading was unheard of. In fact, the first remedial reading clinic opened in 1930, soon after the results of the "look and say" (the so called "Dick and Jane" program) reading methods were beginning to be felt.

Up until the early part of the 20th century, children were taught to read by first learning the alphabet, then the sounds of each letter, how they blended into syllables, and how those syllables made up words. They were taught that English spelling is logical and systematic, and that to become a fluent reader it was necessary to master the alphabetic "code" in which English words are written, to the point where it [the code] is used automatically with little conscious thought given to it.

Once a child learned the mechanics of the code, attention could be turned to more advanced content. It seldom, if ever, occurred to teachers to give children word lists to read, or to make beginning readers memorize whole words before learning the components of those words, or to memorize whole stories as today's proponents of the "whole language approach" recommend.

Based on a 1987 study funded by the U.S. Department of Education, *Preventing Reading Failure: The Myths of Reading Instruction*, 90 percent of remedial reading students today are not able to decode fluently, accurately, and at an automatic level of response. In a March, 1989, Phi Delta Kappan article, Harvard Professor Jeanne Chall (author of *Learning to Read: The Great Debate*, 1983) cites a study by Peter Freebody and Brian Byrne, that confirms the same finding. Today's students are not being taught the fundamental structure of language, but rather are engaged in what Dr. Kenneth Goodman (a proponent of "the whole language approach") has called a "psycholinguistic guessing game."

Two Ways to Teach Reading

One method is usually called "look and say" but many other labels are, or have been used to describe it, such as: the whole-word method; language experience; psycholinguistics; or whole language. The "look and say" method teaches that children should memorize or "guess" at words in context by using initial letter or picture clues. According to estimates given in one widely used "look and say" reading series, a child taught this method should be able to recognize 349 words by the end of the first grade; 1,094 by the end of the second; 1,216 by the end of the third; and 1,554

by the end of the fourth grade. Learning to read this way is supposed to be more meaningful and fun. This method is currently used by nearly 85 percent of the schools in the United States.

Another method is called intensive, systematic phonics. This method is used to teach children how to sound out and blend the letters that make up words in a specific sequence, from the simple to the complex. Today, educators call this method the "code" approach because it teaches the skills and logic children need to understand the English spelling system. When a child comes to school he/she has a spoken vocabulary of more than 24,000 words. Children taught to read using systematic phonics can usually read and understand at least as many words as they have in their spoken vocabulary by the end of the fourth grade. Less than 15 percent of the schools in the United States use this method.

Teaching Reading: A Bit of History

Teaching children to read is the most important objective educators have to accomplish. Reading is a prerequisite for everything else, not only in school but in life itself. Western civilization has taught its children to read using an alphabetic approach ever since the Phoenicians invented the alphabet and the Egyptians stopped writing in hieroglyphics. English is an alphabetic language that, when written, uses letters to represent speech sounds. When students were taught to read, they consciously identified the speech sounds and learned to recognize the letters used to represent them. They were then trained to apply this information to "decode" the names of unknown written words, understand their meaning, and comprehend the information presented as a complete thought.

The English language contains approximately half a million words. Of these words, about 300 compose about three-quarters of the words we use regularly. In schools where the "look and say" method is taught, children are constantly memorizing "sight" words during the first three or four grades of school, but are never taught how to unlock the meaning of the other 499,000 or more words. Reading failure usually shows up after the fourth grade, when the volume of words needed for reading more difficult material, in science, literature, history, or math cannot be memorized quickly enough. The damage to children who have not been taught phonics usually lies hidden until they leave the controlled vocabulary of the basal readers, for more difficult books where guessing, or memorizing new words just does not work. The result is that textbooks in the middle and upper grades are "dumbed" down to a fourth or fifth grade reading level.

This is the real reason why the SAT scores have dropped to such low levels during the last three decades.

Blaise Pascal — The Inventor of Modern Systematic Language Instruction

From the time the alphabet was invented until the time of French scientist and mathematician Blaise Pascal, reading was taught by memorizing the sounds of syllables, and then stringing them together to make words. But Pascal found that by separating the syllables into their letter parts one could learn to read more effectively and efficiently. His method was intended only to assist in the very beginning stages of reading, when a child is learning the printed syllables of his own language.

Former teacher and researcher Geraldine Rodgers puts it this way: "It was only for this purpose that Pascal invented it [phonics], to make the previously almost unending memorization of regularly

formed syllables . . . unnecessary. But phonics WORKS, and has since 1655. So it is not surprising that it was invented by one of the most towering mathematical and scientific geniuses in history, Blaise Pascal . . ."

19th Century: "Look and Say" Introduced

In 1837, Horace Mann, a lawyer and Secretary of the Massachusetts Board of Education, proposed to the Boston School Masters the adoption of a "new method" of reading that began with the memorization of whole words rather than just learning the letter sounds and blending them into words. His "new method" was based on the work of Thomas A. Gallaudet who had developed a method to teach deaf children to read. Since deaf children had no ability to "sound out" letters, syllables, or words, the constant repetition of "sight" words from a controlled vocabulary seemed to be the most efficient way to teach them to read.

Adapting the work of Gallaudet, Horace Mann and his wife Mary developed a reading program that applied the same principles to students who had no hearing impairment. His method was tried for about six years in the Boston schools, and then soundly rejected by the Boston School Masters in 1844. Samuel Stillwell Greene, then principal of the Phillips Grammar School in Boston, expressed the views of the Boston School Masters, and the following excerpt from his essay is as relevant today as it was in 1844:

> "Education is a great concern; it has often been tampered with by vain theorists; it has suffered much from the stupid folly and the delusive wisdom of its treacherous friends; and we hardly know which have injured it most. Our conviction is, that it has much more to hope from the collected wisdom and common prudence of the community, than from the suggestions of the individual. Locke injured it by his theories, and so did Rousseau, and so did Milton. All their plans were too splendid to be true. It is to be advanced by conceptions, neither soaring above the clouds, nor groveling on the earth, — but by those plain, gradual, productive, common-sense improvements, which use may encourage and experience suggest. We are in favor of advancement, provided it be towards usefulness. . . . We love the secretary, but we hate his theories. They stand in the way of substantial education. It is impossible for a sound mind not to hate them."

20th Century: "Look and Say" Established

The establishment of the normal school to train teachers at the same time Horace Mann was promoting the "new method" was not coincidental because these institutions became the vehicle by which to continue promoting the "new method." With the help of John Dewey at the University of Chicago, Arthur Gates at Teachers College Columbia, and the growing network of normal schools springing up around the country, direct, intensive, systematic phonics was debunked in favor of the whole word "look and say" method of teaching reading, with no research to support it.

The Basal Reader

In 1930-31, William S. Gray and Arthur I. Gates introduced a "basal reading" series which incorporated the methods used to teach the deaf to read. Today's basal reading books, used by nearly 85 percent of American school children, are essentially the same as the 1930-31 Gates and Gray books. Their most harmful aspect is their rigidly controlled vocabulary, and emphasis on memorizing whole words before the letter sounds are learned. Some researchers believe dyslexia is actually caused by this reversal of the normal learning sequence.

Children trained to read by the "look and say" method are made almost deaf to print if they are unable to sound out a printed new word like "gate" or "frog" by the beginning of second grade. In fact, they are almost as deaf to the sounds of the printed words as a deaf person is to the sounds of spoken words.

Research Provides the Answer

In 1967, Harvard Professor Jeanne Chall released her review of reading methods with the conclusion that:

> "[The phonics approach (code emphasis) produces] better results, at least up to the point where sufficient evidence seems to be available, the end of the third grade. The results are better, not only in terms of the mechanical aspects of literacy alone, as was once supposed, but also in terms of the ultimate goals of reading instruction-comprehension and possibly even the speed of reading."

In 1973, Dr. Robert Dykstra, professor of education at the University of Minnesota, reviewed 59 studies and concluded that:

> "We can summarize the results of 60 years of research dealing with beginning reading instruction by stating that early systematic instruction in phonics provides the child with the skills necessary to become an independent reader at an earlier age than is likely if phonics instruction is delayed or less systematic."

In 1973, Samuel Blumenfeld wrote *The New Illiterates*, which further exposed the history of how our children are being damaged by being taught reading with improper methods:

> "In the course of researching this book, I made a shocking, incredible discovery: that for the last forty years the . . . children of America have been taught to read by a method originally conceived and used in the early 1800s to teach the deaf how to read, a [experimental] method which has long since been discarded by the teachers of the deaf themselves as inadequate and outmoded. Yet, today, the vast majority of . . . American children are still being taught by this very method. The result has been widespread reading disability."

In 1979, a three-volume collection of papers by leading researchers was published titled *Theory and Practice of Early Reading*, edited by Lauren Resnick of the University of Pittsburg and Phyllis Weaver of Harvard. Of the 59 contributors, 53 (about 90 percent) were in favor of systematic phonics and against the prevailing "look and say" method, which they considered harmful.

Following is one quote from this study that is of particular significance:

> "First, as a matter of routine practice, we need to include systematic, code-oriented instruction in the primary grades, no matter what else is also done. This is the only place in which we have any clear evidence for any particular practice."

In 1983, Harvard professor Jeanne Chall reaffirmed her previous research findings and recommended that teacher training be changed to require the teaching of intensive, systematic phonics, essentially the same approach that had been used successfully before the "look and say" method was introduced.

In 1985, the U.S. Department of Education released a report prepared by the Commission on Reading titled *Becoming a Nation of Readers*, which once again confirmed the obvious:

> "Classroom research shows that, on the average, children who are taught phonics get off to a better start in learning to read than children who are not taught phonics. . . . The picture that emerges from the research is that phonics facilitates word identification and that fast, accurate word identification is a necessary but not sufficient condition for comprehension. . . . Thus, the issue is no longer, as it was several decades ago, whether children should be taught phonics. The issues now are specific ones of just how it should be done."

This fall, 1989, another major study will be released by the Center for the Study of Reading at the University of Illinois, titled *Beginning to Read: Thinking and Learning about Print, A Summary*, by Marilyn Jager Adams. This study will be of particular interest to teachers, because it once again reaffirms the need to teach the English language as a system, and suggests that well-developed concepts about the form and function of print, including rapid recognition of letters, awareness of sounds in spoken words, and rich experience with books and stories, are important underpinnings for children's success in learning to read.

How Have the Reading Professionals Responded to Research Findings

Since admitting fault is not an easy thing for anyone to do, most education professionals respond to research findings that advocate the teaching of intensive systematic phonics with the following excuses: there isn't an illiteracy problem; we do teach phonics; no one method is best; English isn't phonetic; word calling isn't reading; the child isn't ready; the child has a reading disability; it's the parents fault; it's too much TV. But if we are to solve the problem of illiteracy in America, we must stop making excuses and take immediate action to change the methods of teaching.

In December of 1982, a survey of 1609 professors of reading in 300 graduate schools was conducted. When asked which reading authorities of all time, in their opinion, had written the most

significant, most worthy, "classic" studies in reading, the top three individuals on the list, in order, were Frank Smith, Kenneth Goodman and Edmund Huey, all well-known, vociferous, dedicated, dogmatic, enemies of early, intensive teaching of phonics. Frank Smith and Kenneth Goodman are two of today's most influential proponents of the "look and say" or as they would term it, "whole language" method of teaching reading.

San Diego State University Professor Patrick Groff recently reviewed 43 reading texts, all published in the 1980's and used by teachers colleges in training reading teachers, to see if they included the findings of researchers that the "code-emphasis" or phonics method of teaching reading should be used. He found that none of these books advocate phonics. In fact, only nine of these books inform teachers that there is current debate about if or when phonics should be taught.

Despite the overwhelming volume of research supporting early, intensive, systematic instruction in phonics, college textbooks used by most university departments of education fail to apply this research in the training of prospective teachers.

The National Education Association declared in the 1983-84 Annual Edition of *Today's Education* that "the overemphasis on phonics with beginners" is now "ready for the scrap heap."

Why Do Faulty Methods Continue to be Used? It's Big Business!

The sale of instructional reading programs is big business today, as it has been since the 1930's when the basal reading series for elementary schools were introduced.

Each year publishing companies compete for the adoption of reading programs in states like California and Texas where millions of dollars of expendable "look and say" workbooks are purchased every year. Many Americans will recognize Dick and Jane, Alice and Jerry, Janet and Mark, Danny and Sue, or Tom and Betty. These are the characters in the "look and say" readers that most of us have grown up with.

The 1986 National Advisory Council on Adult Education report, *Illiteracy in America* cites several examples of how the cost of reading instruction can be reduced, while at the same time improving reading scores:

> "In her book, *Programmed Illiteracy in Our Schools*, [Mary Johnson] says that: 'The workbooks to a sight method ['look and say'] basal series soon become superfluous whenever phonics is taught by a direct method. . . .the annual expenditure on workbooks was more than four times greater than that on hardcover readers [used in a phonics first program]. (The workbooks have to be replaced each year because the children write in them.)'"
>
> The Superintendent of Schools in Seekonk, MA, hired a private sector organization to train his primary-grade teachers in intensive systematic phonics. The cost of reading materials to implement the new program was eighty-eight percent less per pupil than the "look and say" reading program previously used in the district.

"Mr. H. Marc Mason, Principal of Benjamin Franklin Elementary School in Mesa, Arizona, said that in 1978 his school spent $23.42 per student on reading materials. In the same year his teachers were trained [to teach phonics]. By 1981, expenditures for reading materials had dropped to $8.50 per student, [while at the same time] achievement scores . . . surpassed the national, state, and district norms in language as well as in math."

Additional Obstacles to Reading Reform

In his book, *Preventing Reading Failure: An Examination of the Myths of Reading Instruction*, Dr. Patrick Groff devotes an entire chapter to a question that is most commonly asked: Why do the myths of reading instruction prevail? The answer is summarized below.

There is no single reason for the fact that research findings are not applied in teacher training institutions, or in the classroom. Common sense is defeated by the:

- forces of tradition;
- interlocking relationships between basal reader publishers and reading experts;
- refusal of reading experts to accept outside criticism;
- reading experts' lack of knowledge about phonics teaching, negative biases toward phonic instruction, and fear that phonics advocacy equals political conservatism;
- negative attitudes toward phonics by teachers' organizations;
- unsubstantiated information in educational publications;
- expectancy that research will not affect teaching practices;
- refusal to admit that there is a literacy crisis;
- lack of legal redress for malpractice in reading instruction; and
- establishment of public schools and teacher education as a monopoly.

How Do Teachers Feel About Reading Methods?

Most teachers use methods of teaching reading that their professors teach them, or they follow the teachers guide for the textbook series used in their school system, neither of which present logical and systematic instruction in phonics.

In an *Education Week* article, June 12, 1985, Rudolf Flesch concluded:

"Decades of painstaking research have shown that neither our schools nor our teachers are to blame [for the illiteracy problem in America]. Rather, the fault lies with a method of teaching reading that was first proposed for general use in 1927 and has since been adopted in most of our schools. It is called the 'whole-word' ['look and say'] method because it relies on memorizing the shapes and meanings of whole words. It was introduced with the best

intentions: the idea was to make learning to read more fun for our children. Today, it is almost universally used in this country."

The results are evident in an illiteracy rate that is the highest in our history. We should not place the blame on our teachers but rather, we need a major overhaul of our teacher training institutions. We will not halt the continued spread of illiteracy in America without this critical reform.

The Reading Reform Foundation — Moving from What's New to What Works

In the forefront of the effort to apply research findings to the teaching of reading has been the Reading Reform Foundation (RRF), organized in 1961. Since that time hundreds of teachers and thousands of children have benefitted from the practical application of the sound, proven, techniques of reading instruction RRF has promoted. Below are just a few of the success stories that can be told, and the implication for the nations' schools should be crystal clear.

If children are taught intensive, systematic phonics at an early age, until it is automatically applied in the reading process, then illiteracy is dramatically reduced, comprehension improves, and remediation is virtually unnecessary, except for very few.

Example # 1: Ask Mary Musgrave, Principal, Gallegos Elementary School, Tucson, Arizona:

Mary was a teacher in the Sunnyside School District for fifteen years where achievement in reading, math, and writing was always last. "People would say, 'Well, it's these children.' That offended me because I subscribe to the idea that 'God don't make no junk.'" She was appointed to a study committee to come up with recommendations on how to improve achievement levels, and one suggestion that the committee approved was to introduce "phonics." Mary had been taught that phonics was "grunt and spit," and that children taught phonics had no fluency in reading and, even if they could read they had no comprehension or understanding. Many other policies were adopted by the review committee, including ways to involve parents, improve discipline, and strengthen teacher training, **but the most important policy was the introduction of intensive systematic phonics.** After four years the results were unassailable.

The school was open to everyone in the district on a "first come, first served" basis; the capacity was 623 students; 58 percent were minority students; many children came from low-income families; no federal money came to the school other than the school lunch program; there were no learning disabilities teachers, and no need for them; there was no bilingual education because everyone spoke English, and even if children didn't speak English when they came into the school, they did when they left; the grading system had a higher standard than the other 18 schools in the district, and yet 33 percent of students on the district Honor Roll were from Gallegos; and perhaps most important of all, 46 percent of the students in the intermediate grades were former special education students. After one year, only four students remained in the special education category.

The inescapable conclusion:

Teach Intensive Systematic Phonics!

Example #2 - Ask Charles Micciche, former Superintendent of Schools in Groveton, NH: [Currently Superintendent of Schools in Seekonk, MA]

When Mr. Micciche became Superintendent of Schools, in Groveton, NH, he served one of the 20 poorest counties in the country. He was charged by his School Board to "do something" about the poor reading scores, which were then averaging in the 45th percentile. Everyone, including teachers, parents, and board members, was dissatisfied. After considerable study and research, he concluded the following: "At a point in our not too distant past - some would put the time in the 1920's or '30's - a conflagration was let loose in our nation's classrooms, a bonfire of confusion in the form of a new reading method, look-say, or whole word, which devastated the reading ability of several generations of children, which blackened the landscape of reason, which has given us the scarred legacy we recognize today as illiteracy." But rather than wring his hands in despair, or ask for more money, Mr. Micciche and his teachers decided to try intensive systematic phonics. After a two-week training course, about a third of the primary teachers wanted to try the system. Within three months, the success of their children was so dramatic, all of their colleagues joined in the trial program. Another full year's trial was conducted, and the test scores climbed to, and remained at, the mid-to-high 60th percentile range. At the urging of the staff, and with the enthusiastic support of the parents, intensive phonics was in, and "look and say" was out.

The success of intensive systematic phonics was evident in the improvement of academic achievement, but another side benefit not to be overlooked was it's cost-effectiveness. The old "look and say" system was costing about twenty dollars per child per year to maintain. The cost of the new program over an eight year period amounted to an average annual cost of less than three dollars per pupil. All of this for a program that worked, satisfied the staff and community, lifted reading scores to the mid-sixties on standardized tests, and gave remarkable reading power and enjoyment to the children.

The inescapable message:
Teach Intensive Systematic Phonics!

Example # 3 - Ask Sue Dickson, Author and former first grade teacher:

"In college I had been taught that phonics doesn't work, that the English language is too complicated to be taught that way, and I swallowed that reasoning hook, line and sinker. . . . So, during my first two years as a teacher, I didn't use any phonics. But in 1954[sic], my mother bought a book by Rudolf Flesch called 'Why Johnny Can't Read.'" At first Sue rejected his recommendations. After all she was "the one. . .with the teaching degree." Finally she decided that she had to do something because ". . . I was losing whole groups of students through the cracks. . . . I decided I would give phonics a try. But I was so scared. My professors had been so adamantly against it. [But the result was that] my class had scored so high on the standardized tests that the [school] administrators thought I had cheated [in reporting my test scores]!" She never went back to teaching "look and say" again.

Then she began to develop her own system of teaching reading, using the principles of phonics, but also using music to make it easier for the children to learn the letter sounds. It took her thirty years to perfect the system, but now hundreds of teachers are using her program with thousands of children, from Maine to California, Michigan to Texas! One school system in Mississippi that used the program in 1988 found that students who were first graders in 1987 improved their reading performance by 42 percentile points on the Stanford Achievement Tests. Reading comprehension improved 34 percentile points, and spelling went up 30 points.

The message is clear:
Teach Intensive Systematic Phonics!

What Federal Programs Impact Illiteracy

According to the Congressional Research Service, Federal assistance for adult education and literacy programs is primarily authorized through the Adult Education Act (AEA). The AEA serves 3.5 million people annually, with an FY89 appropriation of $155 million. Compensatory education (Chapter 1) is specifically targeted toward low income families, and teaching reading is a major emphasis of this program. The FY89 funding for Chapter 1 is $4.5 billion.

Several major studies that have addressed the extent of illiteracy have been funded by the federal government over the years. These include the "National Assessment of Educational Progress," "Follow Through," the "Adult Performance Level" (APL) study, and most recently, the Commission on Reading report, *Becoming a Nation of Readers*, which provided a synthesis of reading research and the present state of the art of reading instruction.

The cumulative amount of money spent on illiteracy by the federal government over the past 25 years has been staggering. The following three programs are only the tip of the iceberg:

- Chapter I, cumulative funding from 1966 to 1989 = $61 billion;
- Right to Read, cumulative funding from 1971 to 1981 = $220 million; and
- Bilingual education, cumulative funding from 1967 to 1989 = $1.7 billion.

The six government agencies that provide the most funding for the problem of illiteracy are: The U.S. Departments of Education (29 programs), Labor (3 programs), HHS (12 programs), Justice (2 programs), Defense (5 programs), and State, (2 programs).

Recommendations

1. There should be a moratorium on the establishment of new federal programs to prevent illiteracy, until an assessment is conducted to determine the effectiveness of those programs already in existence.

2. On September 30, 1986, P.L. 99-425 Sec. 901 was approved by the Congress. The law requires the following:

> "(a) STUDY.—The Secretary of Education . . . shall conduct a study in order to compile a list, by name, of beginning reading instruction programs and methods, including phonics, indicating—
>
> (1) the average cost per pupil of such programs and methods; and
>
> (2) whether such programs and methods do or do not present well-designed instruction as recommended in the report of the Commission on Reading entitled "Becoming a Nation of Readers".
>
> The listing required by this section shall be written in such a way as to be understandable to the general public.
>
> (b) PUBLIC COMMENT.—In carrying out the study required by this section, the Secretary shall solicit public comments on beginning reading programs and methods.

(c) REPORTS.—The Secretary shall prepare and submit to the Congress such interim reports of the study and listing as the Secretary deems advisable. The Secretary shall prepare and submit a final report containing the listing required by this subsection to the Congress not later than 12 months after the date of the enactment of this Act. The Secretary shall publicize and disseminate nationally the listing required by this section to the education community, parents, and to other interested persons."

This report was due on September 30, 1987, but has yet to be submitted to Congress.

3. Education is primarily a state and local responsibility, however, in some cases the federal government provides funds directly for reading instruction. For instance: teachers providing reading instruction in the 90-day mandated literacy program for federal prisoners; federally funded reading teachers for refugees or immigrants; reading teachers in the Department of Defense dependent schools; teachers of clients in the Job Training Partnership Act basic skills programs; reading teachers in schools that are recipients of Chapter I (Compensatory Education) funds; teachers in bilingual education programs; or reading teachers in any other federally funded program where improving literacy is an objective. In these cases teachers should be required to be trained in intensive systematic phonics. Restrictions in existing legislation, that would prohibit program funds from being used for such training, should be removed.

4. Encourage the nation's Governors to evaluate reading programs in state funded teacher training institutions, and propose legislation requiring teachers to be taught intensive systematic phonics as part of their training to teach in the public schools.

An example is the Ohio law [To Reform The States Education System and To Increase Education Accountability: Amended Substitute Bill # 140] that was enacted in 1989, and reads as follows:

"(M) [The State Board of Education shall] formulate and prescribe minimum standards requiring the use of phonics as a technique in the teaching of reading in grades kindergarten through three. In addition, the State Board shall provide in-service training programs for teachers on the use of phonics as a technique in the teaching of reading in grades kindergarten through three."

The overwhelming evidence from research and classroom results indicates that the cure for the "disease of illiteracy" is the restoration of the instructional practice of intensive, systematic phonics in every primary school in America!

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